



# Covenant of Relationships

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American Baptist Churches of New Jersey

## COVENANT OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF NEW JERSEY AND MEMBER CHURCHES

American Baptists understand their relationship to God through Jesus Christ as a freely accepted covenant. We also believe and understand that the local body of believers is autonomous. It is fitting that relationships of organizations created by Christians be bound together by mutually accepted covenants.

God has called us to be God's covenant people, living in loving relationships with our Creator and Redeemer and one another. Our covenant relationships and responsibilities to each other are rooted in the unconditional love of God, who has called us to live a life that expresses the full dimensions of that love and who has sent us to witness to all people concerning God's grace in our Lord Jesus Christ. We as Christians believe that the Spirit of God has led us to give expression to our faith and purpose in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through the local church. We believe this same Spirit calls us into a wider relationship as American Baptist Churches of New Jersey to better accomplish common purposes related to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, we covenant with one another and God to be associated as a fellowship of churches committed to a common purpose and sharing in common activities and fellowship. As American Baptist Churches of New Jersey - both as a regional organization and as a local church - we trust that our relationship will surpass any list of expectations as we seek to be obedient to the mandate of sharing the gospel throughout the whole world. Our life and actions, both as persons and as churches, are to be consistent with the confession of faith we have made, and the covenant vows we have taken. Through God's divine grace, we are called to be responsible to one another in our relationships within congregations and with each other in the wider fellowship.

## WHAT MEMBER CHURCHES CAN EXPECT FROM THE REGION

American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and its member churches have responsibilities to each other. The member churches agree to maintain a regional organization that will make resources, support, and leadership available for its member churches.

The following are presented as basic expectations that member churches can have in fellowship with the Region:

### Mission

- Hold Annual Session - inspiration and business.
- Serve as an agency for missions in New Jersey and elsewhere.
- Serve as a channel for relating churches to the worldwide mission of American Baptist Churches in the USA.
- Serve as a channel for other cooperative efforts in ministry and resources.

## **Leadership Development and Resources**

- Provide leadership development events for local churches in person, hybrid, or through webinars such as discipleship, mission, stewardship, education, youth and children, mediation/conflict resolution, goal setting, spiritual formation groups, Baptist history/polity course, current issues, and public matters.
- Provide resources for new church and new ministry initiatives.
- Provide the use of Baptist Camp and Conference Center for retreats, picnics, and conferences for our ABCNJ churches.
- Consultation for pastoral leadership placement (interim, settled, etc...).
- Provide resources for financial counseling regarding budgets, property, and investments.
- Make available information regarding the wider ABC family/partners—American Baptist Churches in the USA and its wide variety of resources.

## **Support**

- Pray for all of our ABCNJ congregations, leaders, pastors and members.
- Nurture fellowship among the associations of churches.
- Provide staff to serve the local churches as needed.
- Sponsor various programs designed to support pastors and church leaders.
- Make available grants and scholarships.

## **WHAT THE REGION CAN EXPECT FROM MEMBER CHURCHES**

Member churches have responsibilities to one another to share in the work of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey. These expectations are the foundation upon which each member church is expected to build in pursuing a genuine family relationship as a part of this body.

The following are basic expectations that the regional organization can have in fellowship with the member churches:

### **Participation in the Fellowship**

- Share in the goals and objectives of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey:
  1. Pray for the leadership of ABCNJ and ABCUSA, as well as their ministries and the ministries of sister churches.
  2. Participate in the fellowship of American Baptists through attendance at the Annual Session and association meetings.
  3. Cooperate in activities and mission with other ABCNJ congregations.
  4. Complete the Annual Report each year and send it to the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey office.

### **Sharing the Mission**

- Promote and contribute financially to the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey.
- Conduct mission and stewardship education, which can include some of the following: use of mission speakers for our ABCNJ staff and ABCUSA partners (i.e., ABC-USA, American Baptist Home Mission Society, International Ministries, Ministers and Missionary Benefit Board, American Baptist Foundation, ABWomen's Ministries, colleges, seminaries, Christian centers, etc.....)
- Support the camps, conferences, and retreats program of ABCNJ's Camp and Conference and Retreat Center (Camp Lebanon).
- Cooperate in ministry with other Christian churches and religious bodies.

### **Taking Part in Leadership Development and Training**

- Use American Baptist Churches in the USA and ABCNJ resource materials in ministry settings.
- Attend leadership training events sponsored by American Baptist Churches of New Jersey in such areas as stewardship, evangelism, mission, new ministry initiatives, prayer, creative arts, officers training, baptist history / polity classes, etc...

### **Making Use of Resources**

- Invite staff of the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey to preach, teach as well as discuss and consult on matters of mutual concern.
- Consult with the Executive Minister and / or Associate Regional Pastors when facing critical problems.
- When calling a pastor, consider only those ordained in American Baptist Churches in the USA or those who would pursue ordination recognition by the Committee on Professional Ministry and Church Relations and who are willing to cooperate in the work of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and American Baptist Churches in the USA.
- Encourage newly ordained pastors to be in a mentoring relationship cohort by the Regional Ministry Team for two years.

### **Giving Support**

- Encourage persons from the church to invest their energies and skills in giving leadership to the regional organization and the association as officers and members of committees and task forces designed to fulfill the goals and objectives of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and American Baptist Churches in the USA.

## **CRITERIA FOR COVENANTING CHURCH**

To have a clear idea of which churches are active members in full relationship with American Baptist Churches of New Jersey, the regional office shall keep a record of how churches are meeting the following criteria:

**Attendance:** Each member church shall be represented at the Annual Session of ABCNJ and meetings of their Association. Church attendance at Association annual meetings will be reported through the appropriate moderator.

**Ministry Support:** Each member church shall support American Baptist Churches of New Jersey by contributing a fair share of the congregation's total mission giving to all or any of the following offerings: \*Region Offering, United Mission, and America For Christ. A fair share is understood to be not less than 2% of the church's income, exclusive of building funds. If your church is not giving, we encourage you to start today. Please contact the Executive Minister to find out how you can begin.

**Reporting:** Each member church shall submit its ABC/USA annual report provided by ABCNJ.

## **REVIEW OF COVENANT RELATIONSHIP**

The Committee on Professional Ministry and Church Relations of ABCNJ shall annually review the Covenant Relationship of Member Churches in consultation with the Executive Minister.

\***The Regional Offering** plays a vital role in supporting the ministries of ABCNJ. These include but are not limited to, providing pastoral care to both clergy and churches, offering spiritual guidance, providing educational opportunities for leaders, and facilitating our camping programs. 100% of your regional offering remains with ABCNJ.

**United Mission** is called our one family offering. As American Baptists, we serve as the hands and feet of Christ. Together we seek to heal a hurting world. This means feeding the hungry; empowering pastors, lay leaders, and youth to spread Christ's love; protecting the environment, promoting Christian unity, and more. United Mission is the simple, efficient way American Baptists pool financial resources to maximize the amount of good we can do together. 65% of these funds come back to ABCNJ.

Thanks to **America for Christ** offering contributions, American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) has helped families who lost homes to floods, wildfires, and storms, along with children living on the edge because of poverty and seminarians preparing to devote their lives to sharing the Good News. These are just a few of the ways we minister to those in need. 33% of these funds come back to ABCNJ.